

Community involvement key portion of upcoming Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – For the eighth year running, Edwardsville is about to host some of the up-and-coming aspiring professional tennis players from around the world.

The USTA Edwardsville Pro Circuit Futures Tournament Presented by the EGHM Foundation will be taking place beginning July 31 with the Pro Wildcard Challenge

tournament and a qualifying tournament for the main draw of the tournament, which gets under way Aug. 6, running through Aug. 12 at the Edwardsville High School Tennis Center on the EHS campus. The tournament is part of the Illinois Swing portion of the Futures tour, including tournaments in Decatur and Champaign prior to the one in Edwardsville.

Tournament director Dave Lipe and community and school leaders, including EGHM Foundation president Joe Gugger, District 7 superintendent Lynda Andre, EHS principal Dennis Cramsey and state representative Katie Stuart all talked about the upcoming tournament and associated community events at a Tuesday afternoon press conference at the Country Hearth Inn and Suites hotel in Edwardsville.

“I’m excited, the same as everyone here in the room, to have this for the eighth year,” Gugger said. “The EGHM Foundation really is an organization that is committed to really assisting District 7, from everything from fund-raising for technology, for drama, for band, for athletics – whatever it takes to make it better for our students in our district.

“If it wasn’t for the support from Dr. Andre and the (school board), this would not be available to us; in fact, we’re the only high school in the (United States) that actually hosts a USTA tennis tournament; they do that because each year, they (the USTA) evaluate how successful the program was – both in terms of how the players handle it and how they like coming here – and also how we do as a community. We wouldn’t have this unless Dave Lipe was taking charge of it.”

The USTA has consistently rated the Edwardsville Futures one of the top events of its’ type on the USTA and International Tennis Federation Futures Circuit. “The USTA evaluates us every year,” Gugger said. “We always get one of the highest ratings; we’re the smallest community, I think, that hosts this and we do an excellent job.

“Part of that is good, not just for the recognition of the school district, but it’s great for the community.”

Not only does the Futures tournament and associated events provide the opportunity for area fans to see world-class tennis, it provides a major boost to the local economy. “This event will bring in, because it’s a 10-day tournament, a quarter-million dollars back to the local community through hotel nights, through restaurants, through entertainment, through any and everything we can offer,” Gugger said. “It’s a showcase for our community and our school district; I’ve always thought that one of the main advantages is not only marketing our facility, but marketing our community.”

The economic impact of the tournament cannot be understated, Stuart felt. “You have to talk about the economic impact obviously,” Stuart said. “It’s a quarter-million dollars,

and that's just directly related to the tournament, the exposure that it brings to the area, I think, lingers well beyond that quarter of a million dollars and brings back repeat visitors.

“They come for this tournament and they go, ‘you know, we didn’t have time to visit St. Louis and all the other attractions – that little town Edwardsville was a great town to stay in, there are other restaurants that we didn’t get to.’ We literally get international exposure through this because have players who have come here from Australia, Italy and France and other places, and I’m sure we’ll have that again.”

The community involvement events this year include some new events, including the established events such as tennis clinics for youths and adults, family days at the tournament, the Mitch-n-Friends clinic that introduces tennis to those facing challenges; new events include a fashion show as part of the VIP and Player Party, a Madison County vs. St. Clair County all-star tennis competition, an Edwardsville High School tennis alumni night and other events through the week.

Four-time MSHSAA boys tennis champion Carson Haskins of Parkway South, who will be a freshman at Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind., in the fall, will be in the main singles draw for this year’s Futures tournament, having won his way into the tournament by taking the singles crown at the recent Edwardsville Open tournament.

The success of players who have taken part in the Edwardsville Futures – most notably 2016 champion Tennys Sandgren’s run to the quarterfinals of this year’s Australian Open, where he fell to 2012 Edwardsville Futures doubles finalist Hyeon Chung of South Korea before Chung lost to Roger Federer in the semifinals – has become a part of the lure of the tournament to players. “Over the last five years, alumni of our tournament – guys who have come through Edwardsville – have won no fewer than 31 ATP titles,” Lipe said. “Guys who have played here – if you’re wondering how good are these guys and what they go on to do – they’ve won 31 titles on the ATP Tour the last five years alone.”

For more information on the Edwardsville Futures and what’s in store for this year’s tournament, visit www.edwardsvillefutures.com.